United Nations A/AC.183/PV.276

General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

276th meeting

Monday, 1 December 2003, 10.30 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Fall ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today, the Committee is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations; Mr. Stefan Tafrov, President of the Security Council; Mr. Chithambaranathan Mahendran, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, representative of Palestine; and Mr. Danilo Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I also wish to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations and all those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

I now invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and for the return of peace in the region.

The members of the Committee observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Allow me to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

Today we mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, celebrated on 29 November, a date of particular significance to the Palestinian people and to the United Nations. Fifty-six years ago, the General Assembly, in its resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, terminated the mandate of Palestine by providing for the formation of two States, one a Jewish State and the other an Arab State, with Jerusalem under a special international regime. The State of Israel was proclaimed without delay the following year while the Arab State, which was to be for the Palestinians, is today still in its infancy, if not to say in the limbo of the international community's solemn commitments.

Israel has since occupied Palestinian territory, annexing land, displacing the population, destroying homes and property and causing, directly or indirectly, the loss of human lives on both sides. Today, Palestinians live in appalling circumstances under the occupation. They are subjected to military raids and extrajudicial killings, individual and collective punishment, destruction of public infrastructure and the devastation of their farmland.

Paradoxically, Palestinians have thus become refugees in their own homeland, since they are effectively deprived of their fundamental rights: the

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued in a corrigendum.

04-22958 (E)

right to live a normal life, to go to work and make a decent living, the right to raise and educate their children in an atmosphere of peace and well-being, the right to contribute to the betterment and prosperity of their community and their nation, the sovereign right to fully live out their citizenship in complete tranquillity and in peace and security.

Finding a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a constant concern and a major focus of the international community for many years now under the aegis of the United Nations. Various initiatives have been undertaken in this context. The Madrid peace process launched in 1991 and the Oslo Accords of 1993 gave good reasons to hope that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East was truly within reach. However, the relative calm from 1993 to 2000 unravelled, igniting the Al-Aqsa intifada. The cycle of violence that followed caused many deaths and injuries among Palestinians and Israelis. Sadly, the majority of the victims were and remain innocent civilians, including many children. The number of deaths since September 2000 is nearly 4,000, including approximately 3,000 Palestinians and some 900 Israelis — not to mention the thousands upon thousands of injured, most of them Palestinians.

Citing its security constraints, Israel has intensified the construction of illegal settlements, outposts and road networks while continuing to demolish Palestinian homes and property. Some outposts have indeed been dismantled, but only to be replaced by new ones built by the settlers. The Israeli Interior Ministry published official statistics in July revealing that more than 5,000 settlers had moved into the occupied territories since January, bringing the total number of settlers to more than 230,000.

And, as if the construction of illegal settlements had not already deprived Palestinians of their ancestral land, the Government of Israel has embarked upon the vast project of building, in the West Bank, a separation wall — euphemistically called a "security fence" — a wall that, in many places, encroaches on the Green Line and separates Palestinians from other Palestinians.

At its resumed tenth emergency special session, the General Assembly adopted resolution ES-10/13 on 21 October, demanding that Israel stop the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, as well as a return to the previous situation, because the construction of the wall violates the Armistice Line of 1949 and thus contradicts the relevant provisions of international law. The General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to report to it on compliance with the resolution's relevant provisions, since the building of the settlements and of the separation wall enshrines the annexation of Palestinian land — predetermining the outcome of future negotiations — and seriously jeopardizes the possibility of creating a contiguous and unified Palestinian State. Even worse, those measures intensify the Palestinians' feelings of humiliation and anger against the occupying Power. Moreover, during the year, the Israeli army has continued its military raids into the occupied territory, repeatedly reoccupying Palestinian cities, imposing closures and curfews, and using disproportionate force indiscriminately and without restraint, causing immense suffering and unspeakable pain.

While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to security — and we have tirelessly reiterated this — the Committee has vigorously condemned the policy and practice of targeted killings, acts inadmissible under international humanitarian law. The Committee has also energetically condemned terrorist attacks against civilians in Israel, from whatever source — operations that have no moral justification and that harm the noble cause of peace and reconciliation between the parties.

Furthermore, the Committee considers the Israeli army's illegal confinement of Chairman Yasser Arafat to his headquarters — the *Muqata'a* — in Ramallah to be unacceptable. Chairman Arafat's capacity to shoulder his statutory responsibilities and to supervise the work of the Palestinian Authority has thus been seriously affected. The General Assembly, at its tenth emergency special session, clearly demanded that Israel desist from any act of deportation and from any threat to the physical integrity and security of the elected President of the Palestinian Authority.

Despite the various obstacles that have thus marked the negotiating process, a number of initiatives have been launched recently by eminent Israelis and Palestinians. The Committee welcomes their courage, perseverance and vision, which should be encouraged. The Geneva accord resulting from those negotiations does not seek to replace the official peace negotiations, but rather aims to endorse the immense efforts undertaken to relaunch the road map.

After a period of relative calm last month, we are beginning to see a positive evolution indicating a

change on the political front. Recently, the Palestinian Legislative Council confirmed the appointment of a new Palestinian Cabinet that is prepared to work towards a mutual ceasefire aimed at putting an end to the bloodshed. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei affirmed clearly that he intended to conform scrupulously with the road map and with the agreements signed with Israel.

To reinvigorate the efforts undertaken to get the two sides together again, the Security Council on 19 November adopted resolution 1515 (2003), in which it reaffirmed its vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, and emphasized the need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. After much hesitation, the Security Council, on the resolute momentum provided by Russia and other Quartet partners, adopted the road map on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) as well as previous agreements between the parties. The Committee, in a statement published the same day, recalled that the United Nations has a special and permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until that issue is resolved in all its aspects, in a satisfactory way and with respect for international legitimacy. With the General Assembly's blessing and support, the Committee will continue to support promotion of the road map and to mobilize itself for the success of the Quartet's work aimed at a global, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine — a solution in which the Palestinian people exercises its inalienable and imprescriptible rights.

We welcome the presence today of Ambassadors, representatives of Member States, observers, high officials of the United Nations and of partner intergovernmental organizations, and representatives of civil society. Their participation attests to the international community's continuing and steadfast support for the Palestinian people's survival and its quest to establish its own State coexisting with Israel in peace and security. The Committee is deeply grateful to them for this annual demonstration of unfailing support.

I wish to emphasize once again that we are very honoured to have Secretary-General Kofi Annan at our meeting today. I should like once again to express to him the Committee's profound gratitude for his exemplary and unwavering commitment and for his active and remarkable participation in the work of the Quartet of mediators. We also want to thank him for the inestimable contribution of his dedicated Special Coordinator, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen. In addition, the Committee warmly welcomes the significant presence of Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, President of the General Assembly, and of Ambassador Stefan Tafrov, President of the Security Council. We are particularly grateful for their keen interest and resolute support with regard to the burning issues of Palestine and the Middle East.

I also want to express the deepest appreciation of the Committee to its traditional partners: the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States, the African Union and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I thank them for their participation in this International Day of Solidarity and for their constant support for the work of our Committee.

I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the different bodies of the United Nations system, particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and so many others. In particular, I want to give recognition to their outstanding staff, those dedicated men and women who persevere in providing humanitarian assistance to the oppressed, to the refugees and to those in need in Palestine.

I conclude by quoting the late Martin Luther King, Jr., who once said "Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal". Indeed, the road to peace must not be besieged with desolation, waste and terror, but must rather be a place for the coming together of peoples. That was the dream of the former Speaker of the Knesset, Israeli deputy Avraham Burg: a bridge between two communities that together seek a new regional and global citizenship in justice, peace and security.

It is my honour now to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Julian Robert Hunte.

Mr. Hunte (Saint Lucia), President of the General Assembly: As President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly I am honoured to participate in this solemn meeting. I commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of

the Palestinian People for convening this meeting and for its contribution to international efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the Middle East. In implementing the mandates entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee continues to play a central role in focusing the attention of the Assembly, the Security Council, the United Nations system and the international community as a whole on specific concerns and developments on the question of Palestine.

The question of Palestine has in fact been a priority issue for the United Nations since its earliest years. After much deliberation, the second session of a nascent General Assembly, on 29 November 1947, adopted resolution 181 (II) on the Palestinian issue. Reflected in that resolution was the decision of the Assembly to partition the mandate of Palestine into two States: one Jewish, one Arab, with Jerusalem to be the subject of a special international regime. In the year marking the thirtieth anniversary of that landmark decision, the General Assembly determined, by its resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, that it would annually observe 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The commemoration of this Day of Solidarity is therefore an affirmation of the unflagging commitment of the United Nations to the resolution of the question of Palestine and of its support for the Palestinian people in their aspiration to exercise their right to self-determination. It provides further opportunity for the international community as a whole to reflect on the question of Palestine and to continue to vigorously pursue initiatives that not only make promises, but that also deliver on those promises, to bring peace, security and stability to Palestine and the entire Middle East.

The current situation, however, is fraught with danger and is far from encouraging. Twice in the last two months the General Assembly has acceded to the request of a majority of its Member States and reconvened its tenth emergency special session on illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory to allow all States to express their concerns on that critical issue. The Assembly, in its resolution ES-10/12 of 18 September 2003, demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, desist from any act of deportation and cease any threat to the safety of the elected President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat.

The General Assembly has also recognized the danger posed by Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and has stated its opposition to their continued establishment and expansion as a grave violation of international law and a serious obstacle to peace. Resolution ES-10/13, adopted at the resumed tenth emergency special session on 27 October 2003, drew world attention to the danger posed by a separation barrier that Israel is constructing in the West Bank, including around East Jerusalem. That resolution reaffirmed the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and demanded that Israel stop and reverse the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in and around East Jerusalem, which constitutes a departure from the Armistice Line of 1949 and is in contravention of international law.

The Secretary-General was requested to periodically report on compliance with the resolution and I, as President of the General Assembly, was authorized to resume the tenth emergency session upon the request of Member States. The Secretary-General has now reported and has advised the Assembly of the non-compliance with resolution ES-10/13. His report is for further consideration of Member States.

History is a persistent reminder that problems between peoples and States cannot be solved by violence and conflict. We must look beyond the current bleak picture, beyond the crisis and towards the action to which the United Nations, and indeed the global community, has committed itself. A majority of the States Members of the United Nations, in the 56 years since the partition resolution, have exercised their right to self-determination and have joined the community of nations as sovereign and independent States, underscoring the right of people to chose to govern themselves and not to be governed by others.

There is broad international consensus that the two-State solution is the only one that will bring this long-standing Middle East conflict to an end. It is a consensus firmly established by the Security Council in its resolution 1397 (2002) and upheld in the Quartet's performance-based road map to a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unanimously endorsed by the Council just two weeks ago in its resolution 1515 (2003). The Council's decisive action must surely give us the impetus to act on the General Assembly's 56-year-old decision regarding Palestine. Both parties have also been called upon to fulfil their

obligations under the relevant provisions of the road map.

This is an opportune time for me to recognize the efforts of the United Nations, guided by the Secretary-General supported by his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and members of the Quartet, for their important and constructive contribution to international efforts aimed at resolving the conflict and the question of Palestine.

We must support those efforts, in the interest of making progress today and of meeting the considerable challenges that remain before a just and lasting peace is established in the region and, importantly, before the vision of the two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, becomes a reality.

I am also encouraged to learn of the participation of civil society in the search for creative approaches and in offering new ideas to restart the peace negotiations. These initiatives are welcome, should be supported and, as fitting, should be channelled into broad international initiatives to bring statehood to Palestine and peace to the Middle East.

The question of Palestine has a customary place on the agenda of the General Assembly, a place that reflects the continuing responsibility of the Assembly for this critical issue and for its effective resolution in accordance with the seminal resolutions of the United Nations. The General Assembly takes up its consideration of the agenda item on the question of Palestine this afternoon, 1 December 2003. Given all that is transpiring in the Middle East and the decisions taken in the Assembly and the Security Council, as well as action taken internationally in recent months, I look forward to a focused and serious debate that will give a clear indication of the position of Member States on this issue.

As President of the General Assembly, I take the important opportunity afforded me by this solemn meeting to recognize and uphold the Assembly's responsibility in respect of the question of Palestine.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, President of the General Assembly, for his important statement, which bears witness once again to his personal commitment and to the continuing support of the General Assembly with respect to the burning question of Palestine and the Middle East, in compliance with the relevant resolutions adopted by the United Nations.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Secretary-General: I wish to thank the Committee for the invitation to this observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the Committee on your hard work and devotion to the cause of peace in the Middle East.

I join with those from around the world who today express the deepest solidarity with the Palestinian people in their continued suffering. They remain stateless and oppressed. In expressing solidarity with them, I do not ignore the suffering of the people of Israel. They remain insecure and terrorized. The terrible events of the past three years and the dire situation on the ground today should be proof to all that the more each side harms the other, the more difficult the situation becomes, the more each side wounds itself and the more it jeopardizes the chance for a peaceful settlement.

Israeli actions — such as extrajudicial killings, use of heavy weapons against civilians, demolition of houses, continued expansion of settlements and the building of a barrier that cuts deep into Palestinian territory — have heightened misery and feelings of helplessness among Palestinians. They have undermined efforts to curb violence and have fuelled hatred and anger towards Israel. They have pushed back the day when Israel will live without fear within secure and recognized borders.

Palestinian suicide bombings, on the other hand, have indiscriminately killed innocent Israeli civilians in acts of wanton and deliberate terrorism. Those heinous acts can have no justification and must be consistently and unreservedly condemned. They have destroyed efforts at building bridges of reconciliation and trust between the two peoples. They have pushed back the day when Palestinians will live in peace and security within their own State.

The violence over the past three years has claimed thousands of lives. The majority of them have been Palestinians, but there have also been many Israelis. However, there is no military solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. The only

solution lies in the political process — one that results in a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

Recent initiatives of civil society have made that point with courage and clarity. I refer in particular to the Geneva initiative, in which Palestinians and Israelis negotiated and agreed to a detailed plan to comprehensively resolve the conflict, and to the Ayalon-Nusseibeh statement of principles. These efforts show the capacity of Palestinians and Israelis to act with reason and restraint and to agree on terms to live side by side in peace. They have caught the imagination of both peoples. They should inspire in all the burning conviction that a settlement can be achieved.

The efforts of civil society are, however, not sufficient and are no substitute for official action. The Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority have made solemn commitments, and they must act to meet them, rather than each waiting for the other to act first. Recently, there has been a period of relative calm, and there have been indications that we may begin to see steps in the right direction. The Government of Israel has declared its readiness to carry out its road map obligations. A new cabinet of the Palestinian Authority is in place with the declared intention of taking steps to establish law and order, control violence and combat terrorism. There is hope that the two Prime Ministers may meet soon and hope of another ceasefire. These tender shoots must be nourished. At the same time, the parties must be judged not by their stated intentions but by their actions on the ground.

The international community needs to be prepared to take bold action itself. I welcome the endorsement of the Quartet's road map by the Security Council in resolution 1515 (2003). That resolution provides a strong platform for the Quartet and other members of the international community to assist the parties to implement the road map and to hold them to their obligations and commitments under it. As I have stated to the Quartet, I believe these efforts should be bolstered by an international presence on the ground.

Meanwhile, great efforts are needed to address the humanitarian emergency and the economic devastation experienced by the Palestinian people. Abject poverty, unemployment, children out of school and a strong overall sense of frustration and despair: all these are part of the day-to-day life of Palestinians under occupation. So, too, is the hardship caused by the severe restrictions on the movement of people and goods, closures and curfews, roadblocks and checkpoints and the construction of the separation barrier, about which I have just reported to the General Assembly.

The Palestinian Authority's institutions and its capacity to work with its people have been seriously undercut since September 2000. The international donor community needs to contribute generously in this time of great need. The Government of Israel must allow the fullest access for humanitarian convoys and relief missions to the civilian population of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Under difficult conditions, the United Nations provides a wide range of assistance to the Palestinian people, through the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other agencies. In spite of a funding crisis, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continues to play a vitally important role in addressing the critical needs of the Palestinian refugees and should be given all the political and financial support it needs.

In the framework of the Quartet, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Roed-Larsen, who is my Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, remains intensively engaged with all parties to support the political process and coordinate international assistance.

For my part, I pledge to continue to work with all parties for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and on the principle of land for peace.

As we express today our solidarity with the Palestinian people, let us also reaffirm our conviction that peace is possible, and that we can achieve an end to occupation for Palestinians and security for Israelis. Let us also remember that the parties hurt their own cause by harming the other or by waiting for the other to act first. And let us resolve not to rest until the Palestinian people finally obtain what is rightfully

theirs: the exercise of their inalienable rights in a sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his valuable statement, for his personal efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and for his constant support for our Committee.

I now have the honour to call on His Excellency Mr. Stefan Tafrov, President of the Security Council.

Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria), President of the Security Council (*spoke in French*): First, I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of December, to participate in the annual commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is a day of remembrance and compassion for all those who suffer from that terrible conflict and a day when the international community renews its commitment to relentlessly pursue efforts for a comprehensive and lasting settlement in the Middle East. Above all, this is a day of hope that peace will prevail, and that the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, will be realized.

Over the past year, the Security Council has continued to support a comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the foundations of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the agreements already arrived at by the parties. The Security Council has also continued to follow the work of the Quartet and to advocate implementation of the performance-based road map which was officially submitted to the parties on 30 April 2003. On 19 November 2003, the Security Council adopted its resolution 1515 (2003), endorsing the road map for a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Council called on the parties to comply with their obligations pursuant to the road map in cooperation with the Quartet.

The Security Council keeps the situation in the region under constant review. We have monthly briefings by the Secretary-General and by his Personal Representative and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

The Council has noted with concern the ongoing violence, terrorism and destruction which has resulted in tragic loss of life on both sides. It has also been concerned with the stalemate in the peace process and the further worsening of the economic and humanitarian situation on the ground. The deterioration in the security situation — particularly suicide bombings in Israel and military operations on Palestinian territory — is one of the main preoccupations of the Council. In its resolution 1515 (2003), the Council expressed grave concern over the continuation of tragic and violent events in the Middle East and reiterated its demand for an immediate cessation to all acts of violence, including all acts of terrorism, provocation, incitement and destruction.

The Council is fully aware of the seriousness of the humanitarian crisis on the ground. Restrictions on freedom of movement continue to hamper everyday life for the people and to strangle the Palestinian economy. Easing those restrictions on movement will enable humanitarian assistance to reach those people that desperately need it, and would improve living conditions for the Palestinians.

The donor community should be as generous as possible in its assistance to the Palestinians. The Council welcomes the commitment of the ad hoc liaison committee of the donor community which will, at its meeting scheduled for later this month, address the issue of assistance for the Palestinian people.

The Security Council is also fully aware of the complexity of the task of achieving a lasting and just settlement to the decades-old conflict in the Middle East. That settlement will require constant efforts by the international community and by the parties involved. In this regard, the Council will continue to support the untiring peace efforts of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, whose political authority and moral prestige are invaluable assets for the international community as it continues to seek a peaceful settlement in the region.

The Council appreciates the constructive role played by the members of the Quartet and the international community. It also appreciates the quiet work of bilateral diplomacy in the quest for peace and stability in the Middle East. Nevertheless, primary responsibility for the final settlement lies, above all, with the parties concerned. The newly elected Palestinian Cabinet, and the Government of Israel,

must work together to overcome obstacles to the peace process. The Council stands ready to assist the parties in this challenging endeavour.

We welcome approval by the Palestinian Legislative Council, on 12 November, of Mr. Anmed Qurei's Cabinet and we wish the new Prime Minster every success in his work.

In conclusion, let me assure the Committee that the Security Council will continue to shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter and will remain fully committed to the ultimate goal of achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and fulfilment of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to a sovereign, prosperous and democratic State.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Stefan Tafrov, President of the Security Council, for his important statement, which again shows the resolve of the Security Council to ensure that the vision of two States living together becomes a reality.

I now give the floor to Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour to convey to the Committee a message from President Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority. The message reads as follows.

> "We are pleased, Mr. Chairman, to thank you, on behalf of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority and Government and on my own account, for convening this solemn meeting on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was declared by the General Assembly on 29 November 1977.
>
> "The Committee's work on behalf of the international community remains a source of hope and an incentive to bravery for a people still subjected to occupation, colonization and oppression. It represents the conscience of the world and the world's people in its insistence on the necessity of ending the historic injustice that has beset our people in order to enable us to attain our national independence in Palestine, to bring an end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and to achieve peace and security for all peoples and States in the Middle East region.
>
> "We appreciate all that the United Nations is doing. Here, we make particular mention of Mr. Kofi Annan, whom we thank for his efforts on behalf of peace. We urge him to continue in that endeavour.
>
> "We also wish to offer our respects to Ambassador Papa Louis Fall and his colleagues, the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We appreciate their outstanding efforts. We also would like to thank all the kings, presidents and other leaders of the States of the world who have addressed this important meeting and expressed their firm and sincere solidarity with the Palestinian people.
>
> "The year that has passed since last year's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has been a difficult one in Palestine in particular and in the Middle East in general. During that time, the grip of the occupation ' as tightened and the barbarism of the associated practices and repressive measures has become more marked, in particular through the perpetration of war crimes against our people. The colonialist settlement of our land has continued and, still worse, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued the construction of the apartheid expansionist wall, whereby our land has been confiscated and the lives of thousands of our people have been ruined. This has nurtured the seeds of malice and hatred and is putting an end to the prospects for peace between the parties.
>
> "This is a reflection of the current Israeli Government's rejection of a final settlement and of the road map, despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and the Council's unanimous support for the road map, which we have personally and officially welcomed in statements by the Palestinian leadership, insisting on the necessity of implementing it. This also reflects Israel's insistence on striking at the Palestinian Authority and besieging its elected President. And it reflects Israel's persistent violations of Christian and Islamic holy places,

especially in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron. It is regrettable that, during the same period, the bombings and the targeting of civilians have also continued. We have repeatedly expressed our condemnation of such actions, since they are harmful to Palestinian national interests.

"The Palestinian leadership accepted the road map and Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and announced its readiness to begin implementing the road map immediately, beginning with the reciprocal declaration of an end to all acts of violence. We still hope that this will shortly come about. We have also expressed support for the Geneva understanding, which could be an incentive to the launch of formal negotiations on the form of a final settlement between the two sides.

"There was has been international consensus in support of the road map, of the two-State solution and of the form a final solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. It is therefore incumbent on the international community to prevent both sides from avoiding a settlement and from allowing the continued infliction of suffering and bloodshed on the two peoples. We reiterate our call for the Committee's support for the prompt dispatch of international observers to oversee the implementation of the road map.

"The United Nations has been considering our cause since the Organization was founded, and there are many reasons why it will remain responsible for this issue until it is resolved in all its aspects. The United Nations has indeed nurtured the rights of our people pending the attainment of these rights, and we appreciate the historic role it has played, as well as its more recent role, including the adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and the adoption at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly of resolution ES-10/13. It is a matter of great regret that Israel has declared that it would not abide by either resolution.

"However, despite all that, the international community must continue to exert pressure. It is incumbent on us to follow up the resolutions of the General Assembly and to adopt such additional resolutions as are needed to bring an end to the building of the wall and to remove the existing parts of it, sparing no efforts in that respect — including resort to the International Court of Justice — in order to open up the path towards the attainment of peace.

"We regret that some are conducting a campaign against the United Nations and its resolutions in an attempt to undermine the legal and political basis of our rights. Such positions are not only unjust but also ill-judged. We in the region need these resolutions to be affirmed and implemented because a lasting, just and comprehensive peace can only be built on a sound basis of international law that fulfils the rights of our people and brings about security and peace for the entire region.

"In conclusion, we convey our heartfelt thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his constant efforts and sustained endeavours to reach a lasting solution and fulfilment of our people's inalienable national rights. We would like to thank all participants for their efforts and for their wholehearted and faithful work to mobilize support and international solidarity to enable our people to realize its national rights on its Palestinian land and to establish an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

"We express our gratitude to all the world's free people, true friends and peace-lovers who support our march to attain the peace of the brave, to which we all aspire — a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in our region — and our people's attainment of freedom and independence. That is the peace of the brave that I signed with our late partner, Yitzhak Rabin, who paid for that peace with his life at the hands of extremists. Finally, I convey our thanks and gratitude to all participants, as well as to all our brethren and friends throughout the world. May we achieve peace and justice in the Holy Land and in the region as a whole."

That message was signed in Ramallah on 29 November 2003 by Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, the Permanent Observer of

Palestine to the United Nations. I ask him to convey our sincere thanks to Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, for his very important message. On behalf of us all, I convey to Chairman Arafat our feelings of solidarity with the Palestinian people in their aspirations and in their legitimate quest for self-determination and statehood and express our unwavering support. I also want to assure Chairman Arafat and, through him, the Palestinian people of the Committee's firm determination to continue its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I shall now suspend the meeting briefly to allow some of our guests to leave the Chamber in order to attend to other responsibilities. On behalf of the Committee, I once again thank for their important presence and their courageous and objective statements the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

The meeting was suspended at 11.45 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Ambassador Chithambaranathan Mahendran of Sri Lanka, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Mahendran (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: The Secretary-General recently stated:

> "The resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the most enduring diplomatic challenges of our times. The modern State of Israel has known war for most of its 54-year existence. The Palestinian people, on their side, have been in limbo, struggling to find their own path to statehood. In the last two years, the conflict between them has been at its most violent." (Press release *SG/SM/8306-PAL/1922*)

I have the honour today — the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People — to speak on behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The Special Committee, established by the General Assembly in 1968, has reported each year to the General Assembly on conditions affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories — Gaza; the West Bank, including East Jerusalem; and the occupied Arab Syrian Golan.

This year, the Special Committee submitted to the General Assembly its thirty-fifth report (A/58/311), a reminder, it could be said, that the occupied territories have been under occupation for 34 years. In its report, the Special Committee sought to convey to the General Assembly its views as to the conditions under which the people in the occupied territories live. They are conditions, the Special Committee found, that do not conform in a number of respects with contemporary international human rights norms or with requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, which also applies to the occupied territories.

The overriding impression formed in the minds of the three members of the Special Committee — Ambassador Camara of Senegal, Ambassador Rastam of Malaysia and I — is a troubling one. The Israeli authorities have put in place a comprehensive and elaborate system of laws, regulations and administrative measures that are designed to meet the policy objectives of the Israeli Government and to enhance control over the occupied territories and over the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The laws, regulations and administrative measures are so framed that they vest in officials a considerable degree of authority and latitude. They also affect important aspects of the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. Rigorous implementation of those laws, regulations and administrative measures — particularly during periods of crisis — creates a sense of fear, despondency and hopelessness among the Palestinian people of the occupied territories. There exists an all-encompassing sense of great tension in the occupied territories, particularly during periods of crisis. And during periods of violence, the exercise of such control makes the lives of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories even more unbearable.

The erection of a wall to separate the occupied territories from Israel has caused immense concern,

hardship and interdiction of the movement of the Palestinian people. That fact has eroded the confidence of the Palestinian people in an early alleviation of their suffering. And the nature of the wall led them to tell the Committee that they had got the impression that the wall is to be a permanent border between Israel and the occupied territories, thereby annexing considerable portions of occupied territory to Israel. Their bitterness at their treatment by the authorities, their sense of dispossession and their sense of hopelessness and despair — caused to a large extent, the Special Committee believes, by a lack of progress in the peace process and by a lack of tangible benefits for the Palestinian people of the occupied territories — make the situation in the occupied territories one of the greatest urgency.

The Special Committee regrets that the living conditions in the occupied territories have not improved as hoped for. The Special Committee, in its report to the General Assembly, made specific recommendations to the Assembly that concrete steps should be taken to ameliorate the conditions under which the Palestinian people of the occupied territories live.

The Special Committee welcomes the formation of the diplomatic Quartet and looks forward to an active dialogue developing between the contending parties. We appeal to the international community to remain fully engaged in finding a negotiated settlement to this conflict. Finally, the Special Committee considers it to be of great importance that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in consultation with the Secretary-General and, above all, in the light of the respect to be always accorded the dignity of the human person, establish a system of continuous communication with the Israeli authorities with a view to relieving the very difficult circumstances in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live, giving rise to violence, which the Special Committee deplores.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Mahendran and ask him to convey our thanks to the other members of the Special Committee. I now give the floor to Mr. Rastam Mohd Isa, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): I have the honour to read out a message from The Honourable Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia and Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which we are commemorating today, 1 December 2003. The message reads as follows:

> "On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I should like to express, on behalf of the people of Malaysia and as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, our warmest greetings to President Yasser Arafat and all Palestinians. We assure them of our continued and unequivocal support for their legitimate and courageous struggle for the right to decide and be masters of their own destiny, to shake off the yoke of Israeli occupation, and to live freely in their own sovereign and independent State of Palestine.
>
> "Once again, we observe this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in an atmosphere of great uncertainty. Yet we hope. We hope, as do others and the Palestinians in particular, for the noble forces of peace and justice to prevail over the arrogance of power and the prevalence of violence, hatred and despair.
>
> "We gather here to express our solidarity with them on a day that marks their oppression and suffering under Israeli occupation. We look forward to the day when the international community will join the Palestinians in celebrating the joy of their independence and statehood.
>
> "On this day, I wish to take the opportunity to reaffirm once again the Non-Aligned Movement's steadfast support for and longstanding solidarity with the Palestinian people and their leadership in their quest for the full realization of their inalienable rights. The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its commitment to ensuring that a just and lasting peaceful settlement is achieved on the question of Palestine. The Movement reiterates its unwavering support for the rights of the Palestinian people to national independence and the exercise of sovereignty in their State — Palestine — within secure and internationally

recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It is highly regrettable that this objective has not been met because of setbacks in the implementation of the road map, which has impeded the realization of the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, existing side by side and in peace with each other and with their neighbours. Clearly, there is an urgent need for the parties concerned to work towards ensuring the implementation of the road map, with honesty and sincerity. There must be greater commitment and objectivity in the move towards peace.

"Over the year since this Day of Solidarity was last observed, we have witnessed increased violence, death and suffering visited upon the Palestinian people. We condemn the adoption of harsh policies and practices as well as the disproportionate and excessive use of force by Israel against the Palestinians in the occupied territory. Those measures have led to more violence, more deaths and more suicide attacks by desperate young men and women. We mourn the loss of all innocent lives. We sympathize with the families who have lost their loved ones, be they Palestinian or Israeli. We extend our profound condolences to them. We call for the cessation of actions that target innocent civilians and the destruction of Palestinian homes and property, which has caused untold suffering for thousands of families.

"We condemn the continuing and escalating Israeli military campaign against the Palestinian people, particularly the reported perpetration of war crimes and the wilful killing of civilians, including extrajudicial executions. We call for the immediate cessation of Israeli settler colonialism activities. We also strongly call for a halt to further construction of Israel's expansionist wall in the occupied territory. It must be dismantled immediately. We are dismayed at the deteriorating economic and social conditions facing the Palestinians in the occupied territory arising from the imposition of harsh measures and practices by the Israeli authorities. There is a rising level of poverty and unemployment, as well as diminishing opportunities for economic activities and education. Vast expanses of Palestinian land are being confiscated. All of those actions will only breed hatred and discontent, making it more difficult for Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side in peace. The international community cannot deny that any further deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, would not bode well for the cause of peace in the whole region.

"We are convinced that there is no military solution to this conflict. Israel and its supporters must realize and be convinced of this too. So must the Palestinians. The cycle of violence, repression and intimidation will bring no advantage to either side. A new resolve on the part of the parties to the conflict to resume the political process, at the negotiating table, is badly required. The key to a just and durable solution lies in Israel's willingness to end its occupation of Arab lands and the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty and to return to their homes and property, from which they have been displaced and uprooted.

"Given the uncertainties prevailing in other parts of the region, it is now more imperative than ever that the search for peace be intensified. That can only be attained through serious effort to bring about the end of the Israeli occupation, the creation of a sovereign, independent and peaceful Palestinian State and the establishment of lasting peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours on the basis of the principles of the Madrid Conference, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), the agreements and understandings reached earlier, the Arab peace initiative approved by the League of Arab States in Beirut and the road map of the Quartet. Each and every member of the international community has a role to play in this regard. We must all work together to facilitate the attainment of peace in the region. The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to cooperate with the international community, in particular with the members of the Quartet, towards that end.

"The Non-Aligned Movement continues to recognize the valiant struggle of the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation and the injustices inflicted upon them. We express our

solidarity with the Palestinian people because we will not simply abandon them in the face of other issues; we will not treat their problem merely as a part of the efforts to deal with new threats to international peace and security, in particular, terrorism. The Palestinian question deserves the continued attention of the international community in the right context and with the proper perspective. It is an issue that concerns the rights of a people, which should be respected in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law, as well as relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Our hearts should go out to the Palestinian people in their time of need and adversity. They have suffered more than enough from the oppression and inhumane treatment meted out to them by Israel.

"On behalf of the people of Malaysia, and as the Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, I wish to reiterate on this very significant and poignant day our resolute and unwavering support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people to gain their right to self-determination under the legitimate leadership of President Yasser Arafat. We express our full and undivided solidarity with them. We look forward to the day when our Palestinian brothers and sisters will finally be able to exercise their national rights and enjoy freedom, independence and development. Malaysia and the Non-Aligned Movement will continue to contribute towards all efforts aimed at attaining this goal. In that connection, we welcome the appointment of Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei as well as the call made by President Arafat and Prime Minister Qurei respectively for both sides to resume negotiations as soon as possible.

"In conclusion, as Malaysia is also the Chairman of the Tenth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, I am pleased to note that a similar message of solidarity with the Palestinian people will be conveyed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, in its capacity as the Chairman of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, on behalf of the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference."

On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, I also have the honour to state that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in his capacity as Chairman of the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, issued a statement on 20 November 2003 in Putrajaya, Malaysia, concerning the adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003). In his statement, the Minister, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, welcomed the unanimous adoption of that resolution by the Security Council on 19 November 2003, endorsing the Quartet performance-based road map to a permanent two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and called on the parties to fulfil their obligations. He further stated that that long-awaited action by the Council was a significant development and would provide the necessary impetus for the parties concerned to implement their obligations under the road map and to move the process forward. He also stated that the Non-Aligned Movement looked forward to full compliance with the resolution by the parties concerned, so as to expedite a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the conflict and to spare both peoples from further suffering and misery.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Rastam Mohd Isa for his statement. I would ask him to convey to His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important message.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Mr. Mehdi Danesh-Yazdi, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, who will read out a statement from Mr. Seyyed Kamal Kharrazi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iran, in his capacity as Chairman of the 30th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to read a message from Mr. Kamal Kharrazi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in his capacity as Chairman of the 30th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows.

"Once again we are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the

Palestinian People. This is an occasion recalling the heroism and dedication of an empty-handed and oppressed but fully resolute people against a heavily armed occupying Power. It also provides illustrations of the oppressed confronting the oppressors and stones confronting bullets, heralding the ultimate victory of right over might.

"For more than 50 years, the Palestinian people have been in the grip of an occupying Power that shows no mercy to anyone. The occupiers destroy homes, schools, mosques, health centres and economic infrastructure. They hold established norms and principles, as well as world public opinion, in contempt and threaten the Palestinian leaders with exile and assassination.

"At a time when the Palestinian people are almost single-handedly resisting tanks and helicopter gunships and their blood daily paints the Palestinian land, it is increasingly imperative that all States, especially Islamic nations, assume an active role in dealing with what is happening in the occupied territories. Islamic countries should tap their huge potential in the political and economic fields and take serious steps to assist the Palestinian people. Despite some efforts made by a number of countries, especially some States members of the Organization of Islamic Countries, much remains to be done to restore the full rights of the Palestinian people. Today, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People provides a good opportunity for Islamic countries to review their policies and actions in a concerted manner and mobilize their full capacities and potential in different areas with a view to assisting their Palestinian sisters and brothers in their sacred struggle against the occupiers."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Danesh-Yazdi, and I ask him to convey to Mr. Sayyed Kamal Kharrazi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran in his capacity as Chairman of the 30th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Filipe Chidumo, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Mozambique to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique, in his capacity as Current Chairman of the African Union.

Mr. Chidumo (Mozambique): I have the honour to read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique and current Chairman of the African Union, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

"On behalf of the African Union, I wish to convey my warm greetings to the Palestinian people and its able leader, Chairman Yasser Arafat. The commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has particular significance for the African Union, as this organization has always attached great importance to the issue of self-determination — something yet to be realized by the Palestinian people.

"The African Union remains deeply disturbed by the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process, with its dire consequences for the Palestinian people. The situation is perpetuating a climate of unprecedented violence, hatred, the killing of innocent people and untold brutality and suffering, of which the Palestinian people are the main victims. We wish to emphasize that the peoples of the Middle East will live in lasting peace, stability and security only through the friendly pursuit of the peace process, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet's road map and the key principle of land for peace. That will require unquestionable determination and political will on the part of all parties concerned.

"The African Union stresses that any solution to the problem of the Middle East must include the self-determination of the Palestinian people and its accession to full statehood through the establishment of a viable State within internationally recognized boundaries. This should go hand in hand with the existence of Israel, in an environment in which both States and peoples coexist peacefully, side by side.

"The international community should not stand idly by and witness the ongoing carnage in the Middle East. We should all recommit ourselves to spare no effort to ensure that the

Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. We therefore seize this opportunity to encourage all parties concerned to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process to achieve lasting peace, stability and security in that region.

"The African Union wishes to reiterate on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People its continued solidarity and support for their struggle for self-determination."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Filipe Chidumo and ask him to convey to His Excellency Mr. Joaquim Alberto Chissano, President of the Republic of Mozambique, in his capacity as current Chairman of the African Union, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saeed Kamal, Assistant Secretary-General for Palestinian Affairs of the League of Arab States, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Kamal (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): Because of the length of the text before me, I will summarize some of its points; the full text will subsequently be distributed to participants.

It gives me pleasure to summarize a statement by the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which the Committee has commemorated regularly since 1975, in expression of its support for the legitimate and national rights of the Palestinian people. I would also like to convey the sincere regards of Secretary-General Amr Moussa and his appreciation for the great role that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People plays in supporting the Palestinian people. We express our pride in and appreciation for this role.

Israel continues to escalate its hostile war against the Palestinian people and their political leadership. It resorts indiscriminately to the most dangerous and violent military operations, which constitute a blatant violation of international law and international humanitarian law. Israel also continues to besiege the elected Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat.

These operations and practices climaxed in the building of the racist separation wall by the occupation Government. The dangerous repercussions of building the wall will negate any possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian State in accord with President Bush's vision. The international community has condemned this racist wall and the General Assembly has adopted a resolution on the matter; now the Group of Arab States at the United Nations is seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice to help in its efforts to get Israel to tear down the wall.

The siege of Palestinian territories by the Israeli occupation authorities has turned the territories into a huge prison, composed of dismembered and isolated islands surrounded on all sides by Israeli settlements. It has also caused the deterioration of the economic and social situation of the Palestinian people, and has thus brought the crisis to the brink of disaster.

Israel has reacted violently to the spontaneous intifada of the Palestinian people against the continued occupation. The intifada was a result of increased feelings of frustration and despair, lack of security and an absence of hope for any possibility of reaching a peaceful solution with an Israeli Government that adopts a policy of war, aggression and expansion and that rejects, aborts and avoids every peace initiative, using excessive and disproportionate force against Palestinian civilians.

The targeting of Palestinian civilians is a war crime that cannot be justified by any cause, as stated by Under-Secretary-General Kieran Prendergast in his briefing to the Security Council on 21 October 2003. The military oppression by the occupation forces has even affected international relief organizations, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Red Cross and its staff and institutions. This has included killing, destruction and the obstruction of humanitarian aid operations. These practices have been condemned in more than one international report, and international organizations have called on Israel to abide by international law and by the Geneva Conventions, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. They have also called on Israel to temper its practices and alleviate the suffering that the Palestinian people have endured as a result.

Israeli aggression has extended to Syria; we believe that this aggression is similar to what the

Palestinian territories are undergoing. The Israeli Government tends to export its crises from the Palestinian territories because of widespread internal opposition to the Government and its practices.

We have repeatedly warned in this very forum that we have been approaching the complete collapse of the peace process ever since the extremist Israeli Government took power. However, we would like to reaffirm that the Palestinian people will remain forever steadfast; this is a key feature of the resistance to Israeli occupation.

Unfortunately, unconditional United States support for Israeli policies gives Israel immunity and places it above the law. The Security Council is thus rendered impotent because the United States veto gives Israel immunity and protection. We hope that this United States policy will cease and that the United States will adopt a policy of fairness and justice, both in word and in deed.

I would like to mention here the speech delivered by President Bush in London on 19 November 2003, in which he called on Israel to stop building the separation wall, stop Jewish settlement activity in Palestinian territories and stop the daily humiliation of the Palestinian people. In that speech, he also renewed his Administration's commitment to work on the establishment of the Palestinian State. However, President Bush also asked the European Union to have no dealings with President Arafat, although he did not mention him by name. The Israeli response to President Bush's call was a blend of arrogance and extremism. The Israeli Foreign Minister affirmed that the construction of the separation wall would not stop and that this decision was irreversible.

Here we wonder if it is not time for the United States to rein in such Israeli arrogance, especially since United States military and economic aid is responsible for feeding this Israeli belligerence and for giving Israel an edge over all the other regional powers. We feel that there is still some time for the United States to conduct a comprehensive review its strategy in the Middle East. A successful leadership is one that realizes its errors and blunders in policy and courageously retracts them before its people and the entire world — a world it aspires to continue to lead. We hope that the United States will reconsider the current situation and the way it deals with it. We hope they also consider the need to exert pressure on Israel to stop its arbitrary practices against the Palestinian people and to consider the danger of adopting the Israeli security logic as the only approach to stopping the current deterioration of the situation. Occupation and its practices are the main reason for that deterioration and no progress can be made on the security track without real progress on the political track, according to the road map, recently endorsed by the Security Council.

The Palestinian Prime Minister has stressed that he will not meet with the Israeli Prime Minister unless the latter demonstrates sufficient flexibility on the issues of ceasefire and withdrawal. He is right to do so, since the Israeli Government is the one trying to render the road map null and void and to have caused the failure of the ceasefire to which Palestinian factions were committed. Therefore, the Palestinian Prime Minister is justified in calling for a third party to guarantee a ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from all territories occupied by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.

The current political situation bears witness to Israel's procrastination and its efforts to kill the peace process, practices it has always excelled at. However, this time, it also aims at undermining even unofficial initiatives between political forces on the Palestinian and Israeli sides. The Israeli Prime Minister and members of his Government attack any initiative that mentions the Palestinian people's rights at all, for example, the recent Geneva initiative. It is worth mentioning here that the Secretary-General of the Arab League, in his press conference on 6 November 2003, considered that initiative as a positive development and stated that it reflected true public opinion on both sides.

Before I conclude, I would like to state the following points. First, the continued Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and their political leadership, territories and resources in a complacent international environment is not the proper context for beginning or pushing forward the peace process in the region or for reaching a political solution. Here we affirm the need for the Security Council to establish a mechanism for implementing resolution 1515 (2003) on the implementation of the road map, so that this decision will not simply become another statistic among the other international resolutions that Israel continues to flout.

Secondly, we call for immediate international protection for the Palestinian people, who are being killed, displaced. We call for the establishment of an international observation mechanism that would monitor the situation, stop Israeli violations in the Palestinian territories and supervise the halt of work on the separation wall in accordance with the United Nations resolution until negotiations can be resumed.

Thirdly, the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, was elected by his people in free elections supervised by the international community. He is the historic leader of the Palestinian people and the symbol of their steadfastness and struggle, and his continued besiegement or his removal would be a dangerous precedent that will destroy the principles of democracy, human rights and respect for law. Therefore, the international community must work to lift the siege against President Arafat and enable him to exercise his responsibilities in accordance with the provisional Palestinian constitution.

Fourthly, the Palestinian people, who have for many long years stood fast in the face of Israeli colonialism and Israel's horrible oppression and aggression, are prepared to remain steadfast until they achieve their legitimate rights to freedom, independence and the establishment of an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, and until they receive better treatment and attention from the international community, regardless of the many dangers and crises in the region. At the forefront of those crises is the Iraqi crisis that has captured the attention of all Arab countries and international Powers. History will not forgive those who help in the oppression and enslavement of people, because those who do so are planting and nurturing the seeds of hatred and violence, whose fires will burn everyone.

In closing, I would like to express my deep gratitude to all participants and to His Excellency Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, as well as to the other members of the Committee. I thank them for their tireless efforts, which I hope will bring the Palestinian people success.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Said Kamal for his statement and I request him to convey to His Excellency Mr. Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I now give the floor to Ms. Phyllis Bennis, who will make a statement on behalf of the International Coordinating Network of Non-Governmental Organizations on Palestine.

Ms. Bennis (International Coordinating Network on Palestine): I would like to extend my appreciation to the General Assembly's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting civil society to participate in today's solemn commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It is a tribute to the long-standing and continuing commitment of the Committee, especially that of its Chairman, Ambassador Fall, and the rest of the Committee's leadership as well as Ambassador Al-Kidwa, that the General Assembly continues to remind the international community of the plight of Palestinians living under the illegal Israeli occupation.

That is an important act, without which the Palestinians might be functionally abandoned by many Governments and institutions around the world. But while recognizing the importance of keeping the issue of the occupation of Palestine at the centre of the diplomatic stage, we must simultaneously recognize the larger failure of the international community to end that occupation. Despite the exceptional work of the Committee and its support by many Member States, the General Assembly itself must be challenged for the inadequacy, so far, of its response to Israel's occupation.

As all participants are aware, the conditions facing the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territories have significantly deteriorated. United Nations special rapporteurs have documented hunger and malnutrition on the rise. And it is significant that the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Jean Ziegler, identifies that crisis as constituting a violation of the right to food, an internationally recognized human right, by the Israeli occupation authorities. Similarly, the Special Rapporteur dealing with human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, Mr. John Dugard, reports that "the occupation of the [occupied Palestinian territories] continues to result in widespread violations of human rights, affecting both civil and socio-economic rights, and of international humanitarian law"

(*E/CN.4/2004/6, para. 41*). John Dugard goes on to state that he

> "finds it difficult to accept that the excessive use of force that disregards the distinction between civilians and combatants, the creation of a humanitarian crisis by restrictions on the mobility of goods and people, the killing and inhuman treatment of children, the widespread destruction of property and, now, territorial expansion can be justified as a proportionate response to the violence and threats of violence to which Israel is subjected". (*ibid.*)

The cruel illusions of the so-called road map have collapsed, with the United Nations still denied the central diplomatic role mandated by the Charter in favour of the false multilateralism of the United States-dominated Quartet. And crucially, Israel continues construction of the separation wall — what many around the world describe as the "apartheid wall" — in violation of United Nations resolutions. Secretary General Kofi Annan's report to the General Assembly, as mandated in paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution ES-10/13, states unequivocally that "Israel is not in compliance with the Assembly's demand that it 'stop and reverse the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory'" (*A/ES-10/248, para. 28*).

Non-governmental actors in Palestine and Israel are today announcing a draft peace plan which could emerge as a starting point for new negotiations. The success of any such process will be determined largely by whether its results are in keeping with the requirements of international law and all United Nations resolutions. Civil society organizations around the world recognize that as representatives of all the Member States of the United Nations, as constituents of the most democratic organ within the United Nations family, you, Excellencies, hold a grave responsibility. The protection of those languishing under military occupations lies in your hands. The restoration of human rights to those illegally denied such rights is your obligation. The defence of those unable to protect themselves is your burden. And until now, I am sorry to say, that responsibility, that obligation, that burden, all remain unmet.

Since we last met in solemn commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the world has seen unprecedented transformations and faces many new dangers. The deterioration of conditions of life in the occupied Palestinian territories parallels escalations in war, human rights violations and other crises across the Middle East region. Civil society has watched our global institutions face new challenges, as the Government of the United States, the most powerful nation in history, defied the Security Council to wage an illegal, unauthorized war in Iraq. We have watched as the Council has faced a new pattern of United States vetoes of otherwise unanimous resolutions aimed at providing protection for Palestinians living under occupation, at stopping the expansion of settlements and the land-grabbing apartheid wall, even those aimed at urging Israel not to carry out its threat to assassinate elected Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

We have recently come through an extraordinary eight and one-half month period in which the Security Council, and the United Nations as a whole, resisted Washington's demand for war. Since that time, we have watched the United States Government announce its intention to veto any future Council resolutions on the Middle East unless its unilateral demands are met. And we have seen the United States claim that the United Nations would become "irrelevant" if it refused to back Washington's wars. But I would assert, to the contrary, that our global organization has never been more relevant, has never been more important and has never engendered more support from the peoples of the world than during that period when the United Nations defended its Charter mandate to "prevent the scourge of war."

The Security Council has been subjected to unparalleled diplomatic, political, economic and other pressures. The "uncommitted Six" Council members which stood defiant of the call to war faced threats of potentially catastrophic consequences. And yet they responded to the demands of their staunchly anti-war populations and continued to say no to war. We should note that those Governments largely escaped unscathed.

But the Assembly too faced unprecedented pressures. Many here may have been recipients of a letter distributed by the United States Government to Governments around the world in the last few days before Washington's invasion of Iraq. That letter, demanding that the Assembly reject even a discussion of the Iraq crisis, used harsh language to make clear an

unmistakable threat. "Given the current highly charged atmosphere," one version of the letter read,

> "the United States would regard a General Assembly session on Iraq as unhelpful and as directed against the United States. Please know that this question as well as your position on it is important to the United States."

We are not aware of a similar specific threat regarding the Assembly's work in defence of Palestinian rights and for an end to Israeli occupation. But we recognize that civil society, operating without the constraints of diplomacy, has the obligation to say out loud what many Governments and international civil servants cannot. It is clear that my Government's pressure on Member States, whether overt or unstated, as well as its pressure on the global institution itself, remain the key obstacles to fulfilment of the General Assembly's goals.

The General Assembly has taken important steps in responding to situations in which the Security Council is prevented, by veto or threat of veto, from acting. When the United States vetoed the Council's draft resolution urging an end to threats against President Arafat, the Assembly moved into emergency special session and responded with resolution ES-10/12 of 19 September 2003. A month later, on 21 October, the Assembly passed resolution ES-10/13, also in emergency special session, calling on Israel to stop and reverse construction of the wall.

These steps are important, particularly because they demonstrate the virtual consensus that exists within the international community, largely excepting only the United States and Israel itself, for an end to Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. General Assembly resolution ES-10/13 was particularly important in its reaffirmation of the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, so often ignored in the reiteration of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). But these steps, important as they are, are not enough. As many here know, more than 300 people representing non-governmental organizations from all over the world working on the question of Palestine met in September here at United Nations Headquarters. Although some participants were unable to come because of restrictions imposed by the host country, delegations arrived from Palestine, Israel, many European countries, Japan, across the United States and elsewhere.

During the meeting, we reconstituted and renamed the International Coordinating Network on Palestine (ICNP), representing global civil society activists involved with the fight for human rights and the application of international law to reach a just peace and an end to Israeli occupation. We remain very grateful to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and particularly to Ambassador Fall, to the Secretariat and, most especially, to the Secretary-General for his support of the non-governmental organizations working on this issue and for his recognition of the importance of civil society's role with and within the United Nations.

During that meeting, we agreed that our top programmatic priority must be to oppose the construction of the separation wall. We agreed that the wall provides the clearest available example of the nature of Israeli military occupation: the expropriation of land; the denial of human rights, especially economic and social rights; the killing and injuring of countless Palestinian civilians at checkpoints; making a viable Palestinian State alongside Israel impossible; and more. We have all been shocked to see the photographs on the United Nations web site showing that the wall's reach has made it only the second man-made object in history visible from space, after the Great Wall of China.

We welcome the Assembly's resolution demanding that Israel stop and reverse its construction of the wall. But we believe that the international community — specifically the United Nations — is obligated to go further. There is a widespread view within civil society that the clear legal violations inherent in Israel's construction of the wall demand a legal response. We support the General Assembly's efforts to bring the issue to the International Court of Justice, at least to request an advisory opinion from the Court on the legality of the wall.

As members of civil society, we are concerned with raising public awareness of the urgency of this issue, understanding that the goal of such education campaigns will be to increase the pressure on our Governments around the world to play a more active role in pressing for an end to occupation. We see the United Nations as the only legitimate actor to centre

international involvement aimed at ending the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Further, we believe that strengthening the General Assembly's position within the broader United Nations framework is a vital part of our work. As a result, we urge the Assembly to increase its strength, credibility and influence by responding to the vetoes of otherwise unanimously favoured Security Council draft resolutions by adopting its own resolutions identical to those obstructed in the Council, thereby demonstrating the world body's rejection of the unilateral assertion of "might makes right" by one Member State.

Along with our focus on bringing down the separation wall, we remain concerned about the urgent necessity of protection for Palestinian civilians. When the ICNP met in September, we sent a letter to the Secretary-General and to the Presidents of the Security Council and the General Assembly urging an immediate campaign to provide such protection. In what has become an unfortunate kind of business as usual, the United States vetoed a Security Council draft resolution calling for an end to Israeli threats, even to deport or harm President Arafat. The Assembly appropriately responded by adopting its own resolution recognizing the illegality of Israel's extrajudicial killings and of its deportations of Palestinians as well as demanding an end to threats against Arafat.

But international obligations go further. It is time the Assembly took greater initiative, acting under the Uniting for Peace precedent — as it has in reconvening the tenth emergency special session — to craft a viable, operational plan to provide serious international protection to Palestinian civilians living under military occupation. Such protection would also, of course, provide protection to Israeli civilians facing illegal attacks that are themselves the consequence of occupation. It is unacceptable for the occupying Power to be allowed to block the will of the international community.

So far, such protection has not been forthcoming. The failure of the international community — the failure of the United Nations — to provide serious protection to Palestinians living under occupation stands as a continuing indictment of the inadequacy of our efforts. That failure — and I believe it is a failure of political will, not of capacity — has led to too many grievous injuries, too many deaths.

I want to remind participants today about just one of those deaths, not, as her parents so often remind us, because her death is more important than the deaths of so many Palestinians — like that of 4-year-old Hanan Assar, killed by the Israeli military in Gaza's Nuseirat refugee camp just one day after Rachel Corrie had been killed — but because the death of young Rachel Corrie has become emblematic of civil society's efforts to step into the breach caused by the failure of the United Nations to provide protection to Palestinians living under occupation. Rachel Corrie was a 23-year-old American peace activist who was crushed to death by a Caterpillar bulldozer driven by an Israeli soldier demolishing a Palestinian house in Rafah, in the occupied Gaza Strip, just eight and a half months ago.

Our civil society organizations are very proud of Rachel Corrie and of the non-violent movement of which she was a part and which carries out its work in her name today. But our pride is not enough; we are determined to fight for a truly international protection force, under United Nations authority, which would make sacrifices such as Rachel's unnecessary. We are sobered by the recognition that, as of today, neither we nor the Palestinian people can count on such a commitment by the United Nations, and so the work — and sometimes the sacrifices — of these brave young internationals continues.

In the United States Campaign to End Israeli Occupation and in civil society organizations around the world, we remain committed to bringing an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. We remain committed to working for a just peace and equal rights for all, based on human rights, international law and the primacy of the United Nations. We look to the General Assembly — as the repository of legitimacy and the most democratic component of the United Nations — to take the lead in reclaiming the centrality of the United Nations in this global campaign. We recall the shining moment, the eight and a half months when the United Nations stood with us in global civil society and with Governments around the world to say no to war.

On the morning of 15 February 2003, as the peace campaigners whom *The New York Times* would later name "the second super-Power" were gathering in cities around the world and outside United Nations Headquarters in New York, a small group came to the United Nations to meet with Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The delegation was led by South African

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a longtime friend of the Secretary-General's, and the two African statesmen — both Nobel Peace laureates who together held the hopes of so many around the world on that singular day — faced each other across a table. And the first thing Bishop Tutu said to the Secretary-General was:

> "We are here on behalf of the people marching in 665 cities all over the world as the world says no to war. And we are here to say that, on behalf of those people marching in all those cities, we claim the United Nations as our own. We claim it as part of our global mobilization for peace."

I believe that Archbishop Tutu was right. If we are serious about ending Israeli occupation, if we are serious about reasserting the role of international law in the Middle East, and if we are serious about rebuilding international legitimacy in Israel and Palestine as well as elsewhere around the world, then we must be serious about reclaiming the United Nations as our own to stand with global civil society in saying no to war and no to occupation. It is the responsibility of the General Assembly, more than any other part of the United Nations system, to stand with civil society, to stand against war and occupation. If we are to reverse not only the apartheid wall, but the occupation as a whole, we need a new internationalism to do it — an internationalism made up not only of Governments, not only of global civil society, not even only of the United Nations, but of all of them together. That will be the internationalism of our future and the internationalism that can bring peace and justice and an end to occupation for the Palestinian people, in whose name we gather today.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): It is often non-governmental organizations that push us, the diplomats, to continue our work to the very end. I should like to thank Ms. Bennis for awakening us a bit from this torpor of powerlessness and resignation and for pushing us to emerge from the influence of diplomatic jargon and from the heaviness of oratorical precaution and semantic posturing, contortions, even circumlocutions. She went straight to the heart of the matter, and we thank her for that. Through her, I should also like to thank all the civil society organizations working on the question of Palestine throughout the world for the valuable contributions that they make on a regular basis to the work of the Committee and of the General Assembly.

I have the honour to announce that the Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. The texts of those messages will be published in their entirety in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights. However, I should like to read out the list of the personalities who sent and kindly addressed them to us.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Mr. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil; His Excellency Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia; His Excellency Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar; His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria; His Excellency Mr. Vladimir V. Putin, President of the Russian Federation; His Excellency General Pervez Musharraf, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, President of the Republic of Turkey; Her Excellency The Honourable Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka; His Excellency Mr. Omer Hassan A. Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of Sudan; Her Excellency Ms. Megawati Soekarnoputri, President of Republic of Indonesia; His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia; His Excellency Mr. Kim Yong Nam, President of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of Republic of Yemen; His Excellency Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; His Excellency Mr. Khamtay Siphandone President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic; His Excellency Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates; His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal; His Excellency Mr. Ricardo Lagos Escobar, President of the Republic of Chile; His Excellency Mr. Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of Cyprus; His Excellency Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of Afghanistan; and His

Excellency Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

We have received messages from the following heads of Government: His Excellency Mr. Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia; His Excellency Mr. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency The Honourable Edward Fenech Adami, Prime Minister of Malta; His Excellency Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia; His Excellency Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India; His Excellency Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand; and His Excellency The Honourable Mr. Keith C. Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada.

We have received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: Her Excellency Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan; His Excellency Mr. Kostyantyn Gryshschenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine; His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; His Excellency Mr. Solomon Passy, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria; His Excellency Mr. Rafael Antonio Bielsa, Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Religion of the Argentine Republic; His Excellency Mr. Youssouf Ouédraogo, Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Burkina Faso; and His Excellency Mr. Mircea Geoana, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania.

We have received a message from the Government of Guyana.

We have received messages from the following intergovernmental organizations: His Excellency Mr. Abdelouhed Belkeziz, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference; the European Union; and His Excellency Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, Chairman of the Commission of the African Union.

We have also received a message from the following non-governmental organization: the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations that I have just mentioned, and to all participants, for their persistent efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of the Committee.

The statements that we have heard and the messages of solidarity that we have received today demonstrate once again the unwavering support of the international community for the establishment of peace in the Middle East and the realization by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy. I can assure you that the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort in the realization of those objectives.

I now have the pleasure and honour to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*spoke in Arabic*): As we come to the end of this meeting, we would like to convey our gratitude to the Chairman for having convened this meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We would also like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

We have listened attentively this morning to all the statements expressing solidarity with us, and in particular to the statements made by Mr. Julian Hunte, President of the General Assembly; Secretary-General Kofi Annan; and Mr. Stefan Tafrov, President of the Security Council. We greatly appreciate their sincere expressions of solidarity, which illustrate the support that exists for the people of Palestine and for the question of Palestine, which continues to be at the top of the agenda of the United Nations, as it has for more than half a century.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the messages of solidarity received by the Committee, which included messages from monarchs and heads of State or Government, who expressed the hope that this issue would be resolved as soon as possible, that an independent Palestinian State would be established and that peace, security and stability would prevail in the holy places.

We also listened carefully to the message sent by our brother Yasser Arafat, in which he expressed the true hopes of the Palestinian people to build a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. That message is clear proof that the Palestinian people indeed yearn for peace and, after many long years of suffering in the diaspora, want to live in peace in their own independent and sovereign State.

Our people have made persistent political efforts at peace in order to find along with their brother Arabs a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pursuant to United Nations resolutions. It is regrettable that Israel has not recognized those resolutions or taken into account the views of the international community. Israel has constantly pursued a policy of expansionism in Arab territories. It has used all sorts of violence, war and aggression in order to consolidate its occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands. Israel has now begun to absorb land through confiscation, establishing more and more settlements on those territories. Israel has also begun to build a racist wall of separation. It continues to confiscate land, demolish houses, raze farms and uproot fruit trees in order to prevent the Palestinian people from exploiting their own resources. In the course of the past three years, it has imposed severe closures. What is regrettable is that Israel indeed finds supporters for its unjust illegal positions, who protect it from international actions.

We sometimes wonder about those who describe Palestinian resistance to occupation in defence of their survival as terrorism. It is Israel that is pursuing a veritable Nazi occupation, imposing closures on the Palestinian people, depriving them of access to food and medicine. Israel continues a policy of assassinating citizens, political leaders, security officials and police officers. It also impedes the free movement of Palestinian citizens. Despite all those terrorist actions, the Palestinian leadership has decided to agree to a three-month ceasefire. We are putting an end to violence of all kinds, in the hope that Israel will respond positively to our peaceful approach.

Nevertheless, Israel continues its policy of aggression. During the ceasefire 86 Palestinians have been killed, with Israel continuing its policy of targeted assassination of political leaders, bombarding their homes, dropping thousands of bombs and killing children and the elderly while destroying the surrounding densely populated areas. That is in itself proof that Israel deserves to be condemned. A European Union poll indicated that public opinion believes that Israel is the premier country that threatens international peace and security. It is well-known that Europe is a friend of Israel, as well as its main economic trading partner. It is also a political ally of Israel that, along with the United States, actually helped to establish Israel.

We welcome every political initiative by the various Palestinian and Israeli civil society groups. That is evidence of the fact that both peoples indeed want peace. Perhaps those initiatives will convince the Government of Israel that it must abandon its intransigent position and stop its aggression in order to open up the door to sincere international efforts that will push the peace process towards success. The Security Council has now unanimously endorsed the road map. That is the best way to establish the foundations of peace in the Middle East. We also hope that the General Assembly will address the issue of the racist wall of separation and request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice, for the wall truly runs counter to every effort at establishing peace. An end must be put to Israel's intransigence vis-à-vis the United Nations.

Israel cannot continue to control occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. All resolutions of the Arab summits — including those of the 1996 and 2002 summits — have confirmed our approach to a just peace. In 2002, the Arab summit undertook a political initiative that would contribute to laying a foundation for peace. That initiative, which was welcomed by European countries, the United States and the United Nations, was regarded as a major building block of a political settlement, as reflected in the road map. May peace prevail.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi for his very important statement and for his message of peace, hope and determination.

Before concluding this solemn meeting, I would like to thank everyone who made it possible, particularly the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information and the Office of Central Support Services, as well as everyone else involved in making this meeting a success.

I also want to remind participants that a cultural exhibition of Palestinian art, organized by the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, will be opened at 6 p.m. this evening in the public lobby of the General Assembly building. This year's exhibition, which is entitled "Palestine: reflections of resilience and hope", will feature traditional Palestinian costumes, embroidery and accessories, as well as photographs and paintings. The collection will depict the spirit and the richness of Palestinian culture, which continues to endure despite decades of occupation. This is a tribute to the determination and resilience of the Palestinian people. The opening of the exhibition will be followed by a reception, to which all are cordially invited.

Immediately after this meeting, there will be a screening of the film entitled "Palestine: Story of a Land". The film tells the story of Palestine from the late nineteenth century to the peace efforts of the early 1990s. Another film, entitled "Crossing Kalandia", can be viewed in the exhibition area of the public lobby of the General Assembly building during exhibit hours. All are cordially invited to the screening sites to view the films.

I once again thank the interpreters and the Secretariat.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.